XXIst Dr. M.A. Ansari Memorial Lecture

CHANDELLA ART

S. K. Sullerey

Introduction by
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New Delhi

AAKAR

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Jamia Millia Islamia, 2004

First Published, 2004

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ISBN 81-87879-32-7

Published by
AAKAR BOOKS
28-E, Pocket-IV, Mayur Vihar Phase-I, Delhi-110 091
Phone : 22795505 Telefax : 22795641
E-mail : aakarb@del2.vsnl.net.in

Typeset at
Nidhi Laser Point, Shahdara, Delhi-110 032
Ph. : 22825424

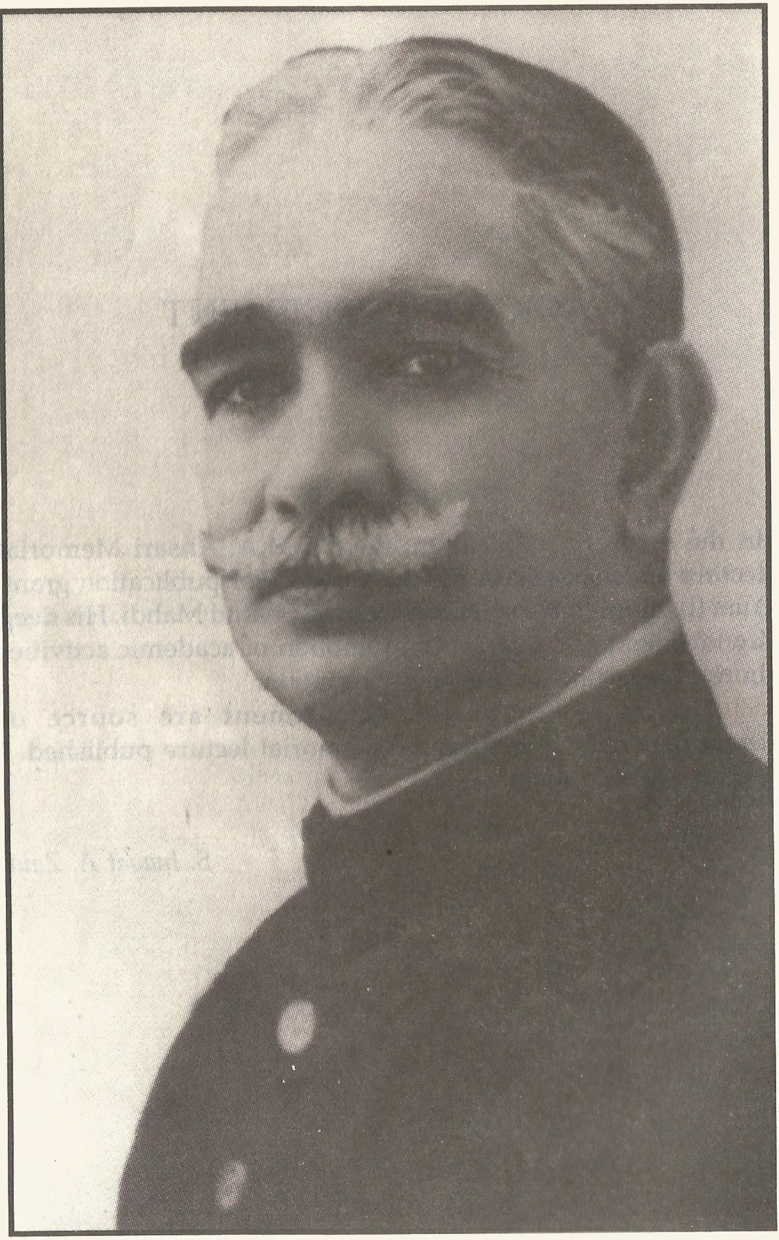
Printed in India on behalf of M/s Aakar Books by
Arpit Printographers, B-7, Saraswati Complex,
Subhash Chowk, Laxmi Nagar, Delhi-110 092
E-mail : nidhi_vatsa@hotmail.com

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In the series of publication, the Dr. M.A. Ansari Memorial lecture on Chandella Art is the second. For publication grant, I am thankful to Vice-Chancellor Syed Shahid Mahdi. His deep invlovement and interest in promotion of academic activities in the Department deserve appreciation.

The members of the Department are source of encouragement in getting the memorial lecture published. I am thankful to them.

S. Inayat A. Zaidi



Dr. Mukhtar Ahmad Ansari (1880-1936)

DR. MUKHTAR AHMAD ANSARI
(1880-1936)

Dr. Mukhtar Ahmad Ansari was born on 25 December, 1880 at Yusufpur, Ghazipur, Uttar Pradesh. He was educated at Muir Central College, Allahabad, Nizam College, Hyderabad, London and Edinburgh. After coming to India in 1910, he actively participated in India's Home Rule Movement against the British Colonialism.

Dr. M.A. Ansari led the medical mission that was sent by the Indians to Turkey during Balkan wars of 1912-13. His close association with Mahatma Gandhi added great weight to the Non-Cooperation and Khilafat Movement.

He was one of the architects of the Jamia Millia Islamia. In 1930s, the Jamia faced the grim prospect of being closed. It was Dr. Ansari, who mobilized funds and saved Jamia. He was keen to keep Jamia going as a living symbol of the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation movement and cultivated Hindu-Muslim amity.

He played a great role in the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930 and continued to participate in the freedom struggle till his death on 10 May, 1936.

INTRODUCTION

S. Inayat A. Zaidi*

Man began his journey from Africa and travelled to the different parts of the world in time and space. He possessed thinking faculty and thus, started creating different objects according to his needs. The power of thinking did generate in him a sense of good, bad, likes and dislikes. Thus, three processes worked together imagination, conception and creation. He made different tools for hunting. Similarly, some objects depicting the aesthetic sense were also created by him. These objects were not simply of material use but gave a sense of pure visual pleasure. The object which gives a sense of pleasure is a work of *art*.

H.W. Janson, a well-known art historian explains, "the art is first of all a word one that acknowledges both the idea and the fact of art. Without it, we might well ask whether art exists in the first place? The term is not found in every society, yet art is made everywhere. Art, therefore, is also an object, but not just any kind of object. Art is an aesthetic object. It is meant to be looked at and appreciated for its intrinsic value."[1]

The word art, derived from the Latin word *ars,* meaning "skill", has changed through history.[2] Thus, art has a wider connotation. In any sphere of life, if *ars* (skill) has been shown and appreciated by the people, it is called art. But in nineteenth century Europe, distinction arose between *artist* and *artisan*.[3] An artisan denotes a skilled manual worker and an artist is one who has the capacity for imaginative invention. Thus the latter has the intellectual power to imagine, to conceive and to produce what is recognized as a new and unique creations. 'Art' and 'artist' are not absolute terms, rather, an abstract perception. Quality in the art of an artist determines his position in the class of his fraternity.

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The consciousness about history of art began in the mid16th century when Giorgio Vasari compiled information about Renaissance artists' lives and works in *Lives of the Artists*. The concept of modern art history began in the mid18th century. Scientific and rational interpretations were applied to understand the competitive arts in the spectrum of time and space. In the 19th century and subsequent period, it became a distinct discipline. Its development was also seen in biological overtones as birth, development, maturity and decay. This model of art history as a "scientific" pursuit was established not only because of its overt biological overtones, but also because of the analytical method. Gottfried Semper (1803 -79) took the biological parallel a step further and adopted the history of art to evolutionary theory.[4]

However, understanding the developments in Indian art was not seen simply in the context of time and space but was associated with different religions and religious communities. Two main distinctions were made, i.e., Hindu and Islamic art. The Buddhist and Jain arts merged in the Hindu art. Islamic or Muslim art came from outside India and "transplanted to Indian soil".[5] Thus, the art and its aesthetic sense was also communalized, like any other aspect of Indian history. An important aspect of adopting new techniques, methods and material in the process of creating art by each other was overlooked. The combination of the two made each other subtle. The art of Chandella temples has its own merit of appreciation and the art in the making of the Taj Mahal has its own traits and attraction. The dome represents a secular symbol when it was incorporated in the temple and Gurudwara architecture. Why do we not see it as an evolutionary process and assimilation of two skills ? Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, who is known as an iconoclast and temple destroyer was astonished to see the Ellora art and could not resist praising and eulogizing in the following words:

"San‘ sān‘ haqīqī subhāna ast"[6]

(It is the truth of the glorifying Creator) .

Today the definition of Art has a larger canvas and it encompasses numerous aspects of creation of human activities. It can be in physical, theoretical, visual and verbal forms which throw light on vivid nature of historical themes.

Persons who have the expertise to determine the value of art works are known as connoisseurs and they concentrate almost exclusively on individual works of art and are concerned only with determining the authentic identity of these works (i.e., artist, date, provenance, etc.). They are not interested in dealing with art history as a sweeping construct, nor are they particularly concerned with its development.[7]

But without relating art to the socio-religious and economic development in society, its significance becomes infructuous. Thus, some scholars like *G.W.F. Hegel* (1770-1831) provided a methodological vision that had significant influence on the development of art history as a discipline. *Hegel* was not devoted to art specifically but his overall philosophy included art, identifying it, along with religion and philosophy as a manifestation of the "Absolute definite spirit". His major contribution was the construction of a dialectic system a force that propels all aspects of the world to construct movement through struggle.[8]

Scholars like Frederick Antal (1887-1954), following the Marxist approach held that art works can be explained by political, economic and social factors. He utilized the now familiar concept of antithetical polarities to describe a dichotomy of styles; however, his distinctions were not based on formal aspects but on the class which produced the work of art, claiming that the acceptance of a particular art work by a particular class proves that it was produced for that class. Style is defined as being either "rational" or "irrational".[9]

"Rational art" is connected to the emergence of a progressive trend which strives to bring upper and lower classes together (it is usually produced by an active bourgeois or middle class), while "irrational art' (i.e. emotional, sentimental, mystical art) reflected an attitude that accepted the division of classes.[10]

In the light of the foregoing discussion, Chandella art evinces a variety of historical aspects. One important rational trait is a combination of religion and sex which go hand-in-hand. In those times and society, sex was not considered taboo and was rationally perceived as an essential part of life. This feeling and desire was expressed in different sexual postures of sculpture. Thus, it was an expression of '*Zeitgeist*' or 'spirit' of the age.[11] Availability of enormous literature on the art of sex should not be understood and undermined simply as a matter of pleasure,[12] but it can be related to fertility and demography.[13] *Shivlinga* is known symbolically as creator of the universe. Need of man power in the military and agricultural sector required encouragement to increase population. It also throws light on gender history. Woman became the symbol of cultural subordination. Woman in no way was shown superior or equal to man whether it is a historical narrative, folk culture[14] or even in the temple art motifs.

In the Chandella temple art, woman was not completely ignored but was given a place of subordination. The Vishnu temple of Devi Jagdambi instructs us about this perception of subordination. Devi Jagdambi temple is simple in design as it has only four compartments, the *ardhamandapa* or portico consisting of only one chamber instead of two and there is no processional passage round cella ,[15] while temples representing male deities are fabulous and magnificent in structure as well as décor.

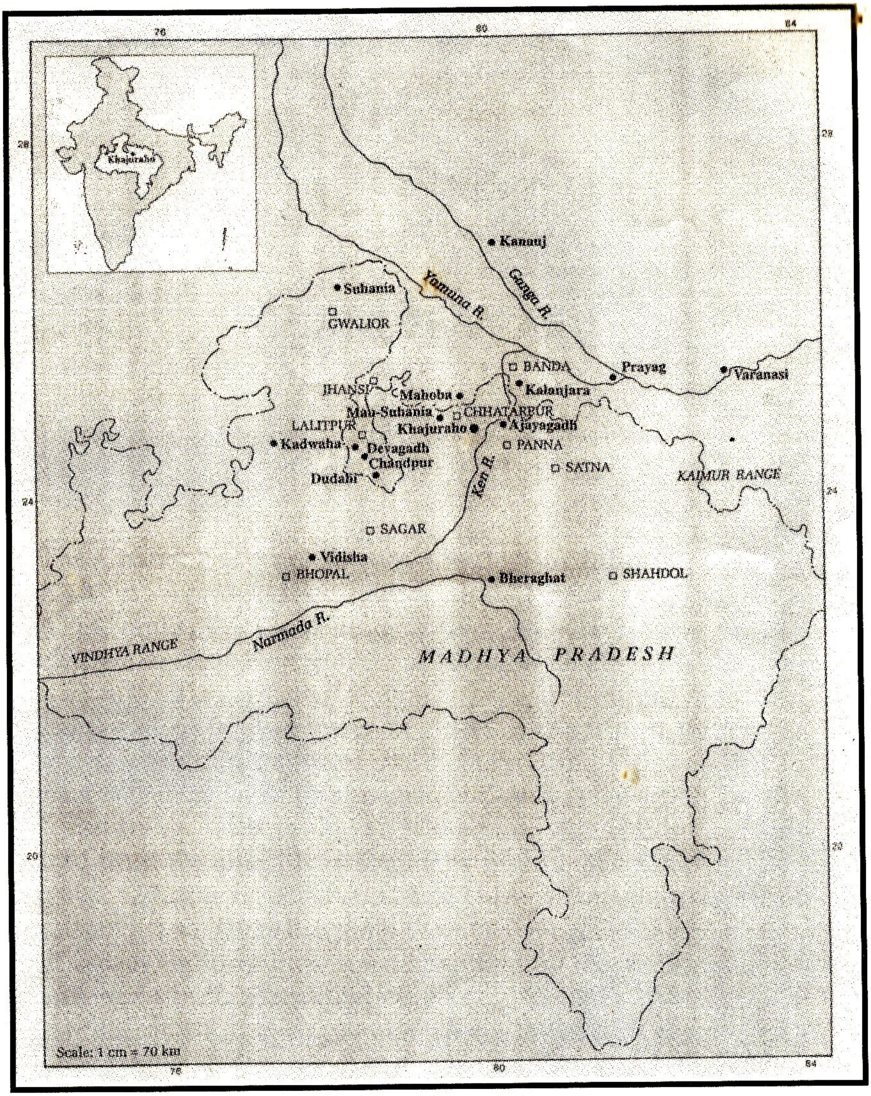
Diversities in the Indian culture and all the more, significance of its sustenance through the past, is its unique characteristic in the world civilizations. Showing respect to other's religious faiths and cultural values inherited from the long past is a strength of India's unity in diversity. In the light of long duree historical vision, if one looks at the Divine Boar amidst the western royal temple complex at Khajuraho, it suggests how the boar, originally a totemic deity of some powerful non-Aryan tribe of central India, underwent Bramanization and associated with the Creator god Brahma (Prajapat).[16] Subsequently, boar's image as deity is known from Haryana and Kashmir.[17] Thus the boar was a deity for many persons while others disliked it from their religious point of view but there were people who relished the meat of the boar. Mughal Emperor Jahangir (1605-1628) hunted wild boar and presented their meat to Rajputs.[18]

NOTES

1. H.W. Janson, *History of Art*, New York, 1996, p.16.
2. Grolier, *Encyclopedia of Knowledge*, Danbury, Connecticut, 1991.
3. Ibid.
4. J.J. Winckelmann (1717- 68), *The History of Ancient Art*, English tr. (1849 - 73) referred in *Encyclopedia of Historians and Historical Writings*, Vol.I, ed. Kelly Boyd, London, 1992, p.52.
5. See Mario Bussagli and Colembus Sivaramamurti, *5000 Years of the Art of India*, New York, 1970, p.7.
6. Kalimat-i Taiyibat by Inayatulla Khan Kashmiri, ed. S.M.A. Husain, Delhi, 1982, p.13; In 1683, Saqi Mustaid Khan wrote, " Unless one sees it, no written description can correctly picture it." Ma'asir-i Alamgiri, tr., Calcutta, 1947, p.146.
7. See *Encyclopedia of Historians and Historical Writings*, Vol.I, p.52.
8. Ibid.
9. Frederick Antal, *Classicism and Romanticism, with other Studies in Art History*, New York, London, 1966.
10. Ibid.
11. Grolier, Op. Cit., p.87.
12. Devangana Desai, *Erotic Sculpture of India- A Socio- Cultural Study*, Delhi, 1985, (2nd edition) pp. 183-85.
13. In some civilizations, the female motif became a symbol of fertility, the earth-mother, associated with fertility, the agricultural seasons, and rebirth, or with the lady of Beasts, the Potniatheron whose cult seems attested in Anatolia as early as the sixth millennium B.C., See Grahame Clark and Stuart Piggot, *Pre-historic Societies*, Penguin Books, Reprint,

1976, pp. 177-78.

14. Sunita Zaidi, 'Woman – A Symbol of Cultural Subordination', paper presented to the International seminar on "*Society, Economy and Culture in India till 18th Century*", 5-7 January, 2002, organized by the Centre of Advance Study in History, Aligarh Muslim University.
15. Percy Brown, *Indian Architecture* (Buddhist and Hindu Period), Bombay, 2nd edition, 1942, p. 136.
16. Suvira Jaiswal, *The Origin and Development of Vaisnavism,* 2nd edition, New Delhi, 1981, pp. 131-32.
17. Devangana Desai, *The Religious Imagery of Khajuraho,* Bombay, 1996, pp 64-65
18. *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe (1615-19),* ed. W. Foster, Oxford, 1906-27, pp. 105, 127, 284.


76
80
84
28
24
20
Khajuraho
Kanauj
Ganga R.
Yamuna R.
Suhania
GWALIOR
BANDA
Prayag
Varanasi
JHANSI
Mahoba
Kalanjara
Mau-Suhania
CHHATARPUR
LALITPUR
Khajuraho
Ajayagadh
Kadwaha
Devagadh
Chandpur
PANNA
SATNA
KAIMUR RANGE
Dudahi
Ken R.
SAGAR
Vidisha
BHOPAL
Bheraghat
SHAHDOL
VINDHYA RANGE
Narmada R.
MADHYA PRADESH
Scale: 1 cm = 70 km

Map of the Chandella and Related Temple Sites of Central India

Note : Reproduced from Devangana Desai's
The Religious Imagery of Khajuraho, Mumbai, 1966.

CHANDELLA ART

The Chandellas were the most important ruling dynasty of early medieval India. They decorated their kingdom with lakes, tanks, forts, palaces and temples, which were mainly centred in their strongholds of Mahoba (ancient Mahotsava-nagara), Kalanjara and Ajaigarh (Jayapura-durga)[1] and to a lesser extent, in their towns of Dudahi, Chandpur, Madanpur and Deogarh. But none of these places could be compared in magnificence with Khajuraho, which was adorned by the Chandellas with tanks and temples. According to local tradition, the place had originally eighty five temples,[2] but only twenty five now remain in different stages of preservation. There are more than fifty mounds at Khajuraho, of which eighteen have been identified by the Archaeological Survey of India for future excavation. Recently, a beautifully carved plinth of a large early eleventh-century temple was unearthed in the southern area of the site.[3] Thus, the contribution of the Chandellas in the field of art and architecture is much more significant than their political achievements.

The study of Chandella historiography provides a basis to study the trends of Chandella art. The study of Chandella history began during the nineteenth century. Lieutenant William Price presented a paper in 1813 at the Asiatic Society of Bengal on the Sanskrit inscription found at Mau near Khajuraho,[4] which for the first time drew the attention of historians to the Chandella dynasty. Captain W. R. Pogson published his book *History of the Bundelas* in the year 1828,[5] in which he mentioned some important places related to Chandella history and art with maps and description of Kalanjara and Ajaigarh. Captain T.S.Burt[6] visited Khajuraho in 1838 and published a colourful account of the Khajuraho temples in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal,* which attracted the attention of scholars. General F. C. Maisy[7] had published his paper along with line drawings, maps and inscriptions in the *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal* (1848) entitled 'Description of the Antiquities at Kalinjar' in which he has very extensively surveyed the Chandella fort at Kalanjara. Along with Kalanjara fort he has given a brief account of another Chandella fort at Ajaigarh. In 1852 he made the earliest line drawing of Khajuraho temples.[8] Actually there was nothing authentic was known of the Chandella dynasty until the publication of Cunningham's *Archaeological Survey Reports* (Vols. II, VII, X and XXI) in the years 1864 to 1885.[9] The importance of the Reports and contribution of Cunningham can be measured by the fact that even today no study of the Chandellas is possible without the help of his Reports and many of the conclusions drawn by Cunningham still hold good. On the basis of these Reports and other inscriptions, Smith published a scholarly paper on the Chandellas in the year 1908, in Volume XXXVII of *Indian Antiquary.*[10] Till this time the history of the Chandellas and other dynasties was still very obscure and little of the period was known until the publication in 1931 and 1936 of H.C.Ray's *Dynastic History of Northern India* which not only contributed to the knowledge of the history of dynasties, but also emphasized the vast scope of the subject and need for future researches.[11] Gore Lal Tiwari published his book entitled *Bundelkhand Ka Itihasa* in Hindi in 1933.[12] His book gives a brief history of the Bundelkhand region. Keshav Chandra Mishra's book entitled *Chandella Aur Unka Rajatva Kala* was published in 1954 in Hindi.[13] He studied the Chandella history, culture and art on the basis of literary and archaeological sources. The first research work on Chandella history entitled *History* *of the Chandellas* was published in 1956 by N.S.Bose.[14] He made an attempt to trace the full history of Chandellas on the basis of inscriptions and contemporary literary works. Besides the political history, he has discussed the administration, social, economic, cultural and religious life along with art and architecture during the time of Chandella's in brief. O.C.Gangoly published the first monograph called the 'Art of Chandellas' in 1957, on the basis of Khajuraho sculptures.[15] This monograph gives a good description of Khajuraho sculptures but ignores other centres of Chandella art. In this monograph, for the first time the aesthetic value of Chandella sculpture was brought out in a commendable manner. In the same year a special issue of art journal *Marg* on Khajuraho highlighted the sculptural wealth of Khajuraho.[16] In 1958, S.K. Mitra published his doctoral thesis entitled 'Early Rulers of Khajuraho' in which he discussed the political history of Chandellas and also highlighted the socio-economic and religious condition on the basis of epigraphic sources along with art and architecture of the Chandellas.[17] The second edition of his book was published in 1977 in which he added two appendices, viz., 'Chandella land grants and fedualism' and a 'A Note on aspect of Chandella architecture'. The former contradicts R.S. Sharma's theory on feudalism and its application to Chandella land grants. The second appendix contains an important suggestion that all the Khajuraho temples, Hindu and Jaina, must have been built by the same community of builders, belonging to a single school of architecture, i.e., Nagar style of Central India. As craftsmen, they themselves might have had no sectarian bias and represented enthusiastically to the requirements of their patrons irrespective of their religious afflications.[18] Krishna Deva published in 1959 an article in *Ancient India* (No. 15) entitled 'The temples of Khajuraho in Central India'.[19] In this paper, he has studied the Khajuraho temple architecture and sculptural art in depth on the basis of site survey and texts. He has given a classification of Khajuraho sculptures which is acceptable to art historians. E. Zannas and J. Auboyer in 1960 published their work *Khajuraho*.[20] In the same year, Kanwarlal published his *Immortal Khajuraho*.[21] This book is written for the tourists. In 1964 Urmila Agrawala published her doctoral dissertation 'Khajuraho sculptures and their significance'.[22] She made an attempt to study the Khajuraho sculptures on the basis of iconography for the first time. A discussion of the social significance of the sculptures for the study of contemporary social life as revealed in the Khajuraho sculptures was the highlight of this work. H.D. Sankalia pubished his paper 'Socio-economic background of Khajuraho' in the *Journal of Indian History* in 1966.[23] He made an attempt to discuss briefly factors which made it possible for these magnificient temples to come into existence, and which possibly also account for the prominently erotic elements in its sculptures. The reasons for building the temple at Khajuraho seems to him to be that nearabout Panna, they found not only excellent sandstone but also diamonds.[24] Vidya Prakash published his book *Cultural Life in Khajuraho Sculpture* in 1965.[25] He discusses the various aspects of social and cultural life of Khajuraho as revealed from the sculptures. In the same year, another book in Hindi titled *Khajuraho Ki Deva Pratimayain* by Ramasraya Awasthi came into print.[26] This was an attempt to study the iconography of some important deities of Khajuraho temple in depth and in which a good textual interpretation of images was brought out. In the meantime, Mulkraj Anand's monograph '*Khajuraho*' came out.[27] His attempt was to highlight the aesthetic value of the Khajuraho sculptures. June Claus published *Deogarh,* an important site of Chandella art in which the Jain icons at Deogarh were discussed in detail.[28] Bhagchandra Jain published his dissertation *Deogarh Ki Jain Kala* in which he made an attempt to study the Jain sculptures found at Deogarh having iconographic significance.[29] A.P. Pandey's research work *Chandella Kalin Bundelkhand Ka Itihasa* (1968) in Hindi was a study narrative and its character pertaining Chandella art is merely a survey of the Cunningham Reports.[30] In 1977, R.K. Dikshit's thesis 'Chandellas of Jejakabhukti' provided an authentic account of the history of the Chandellas, and is well documented.[31] It is based on a critical appreciation of the available sources, literary as well as archaeological and personal exploration leading to discovery of new inscriptions that had not been noticed earlier. The author has utilized

Rupaksatakam,[32] an important work of Chandella times, for the first time–a work that has not been noticed by other writers on the subject. The cultural part of his thesis has remained unpublished till today. K.L. Agrawal's *Khajuraho* in Hindi was released in the same year.[33] He made an attempt to study the monuments of Khajuraho in the light of geo-political, socio-economic and religious backgrounds and also added the translation of some important inscriptions of Khajuraho in Hindi. Krishna Deva's guide book *Khajuraho* published by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) in the year 1980 gives an authentic account of the Khajuraho temples for general readers and also for scholars.[34] S.D. Trivedi's catalogue of sculptures in the Jhansi Museum released in 1983 gives an account of Chandella sculptures found in Jhansi region of Uttar Pradesh.[35] His next publication was *Bundelkhand Ka Puratattava* in Hindi.[36] In this he described the archaeological sites of the Bundelkhand region and also incorporated some new material found in some sites of Bundelkhand. K.K. Chakravarti released his monograph *'Khajuraho'* in 1985.[37] He had propounded that the Khajuraho artist describe the total rather than the partial life of the entire community or of any individual. His sculptures and his temples were the manifestation of his inner vision. The book contains very good photographs and line drawings of the Khajuraho temples and sculptures. Krishna Deva's[38] *'Khajuraho'* in 1987, and again an ASI publication, *The temples of Khajuraho* in two volumes were remarkable editions.[39] Both these works of Krishna Deva contributed a very significant and authentic study of sculptural and architectural study of Chandella art with particular reference to Khajuraho. He has given a scholarly and text-based study of Khajuraho architecture and art. M.N.P. Tiwari's *Khajuraho Ka Jain Puratattava* (1987), in Hindi, provides a critical account of the Jain sculptures of Khajuraho.[40] The author's publication *Ajaigarh Aur Kalanjara Ki Devapratimayain* (1987) has for the first time studied the famous Chandella forts of Ajaigarh and Kalanjara as art centres of the Chandellas.[41] The author brought out the significance of rock-cut Chandella sculptures which had not been studied by previous art-historians of the Chandella school. The sculptures of Ajaigarh and Kalanjara are important from the artistic and iconographic point of view. M.N.P. Tiwari organised a site seminar at Khajuraho in 1987, in which he invited a good number of scholars connected with subject.[42] It was a good attempt to study the monument at site and discuss matters of controversy and exchange views on various aspects related to the sculptural study of the site. The proceedings of the seminar, published by the Department of Archaeology, Madhya Pradesh in 1994 was edited by K.K. Chakravarti, M.N.P. Tiwari and Kamal Giri.[43] It contains papers on different aspects of Khajuraho art and architecture. It is an important contribution of scholars in the field of Chandella art. Devengana Desai has made a genuine contribution to the study of Chandella art and iconography.[44] She has published many research papers on various aspects of Khajuraho art in Indian and foreign journals and also brought out her book *The Religious Imagery of Khajuraho*, in which she discusses critically the importance of the religious imagery of Khajuraho and placement of the images. Her contributions are commendable and original attempt has been made to explain the meaning of erotic sculptures on the textual basis. She propounded the view that erotic sculptures are not the only attraction of Khajuraho. She has also discussed the religious trends of Khajuraho prevalent during the Chandella period and their impact on the art and architecture of Khajuraho. Another book entitled *Khajuraho* was released by her in 2000.[45] This book is very useful for scholars as well as for general visitors of Khajuraho. In this she has incorporated the latest information regarding the temples of Khajuraho.

For the study of Chandella history and art I have made an attempt to incorporate all the significant publications related to the historiography of the Chandellas. This review of works gives us an idea about the direction of studies done so far in the subject concerned. We can conclude that mostly studies on Chandella art are focused around Khajuraho. Scholars are so overwhelmed with the magnificence of Khajuraho that they overlook other centres of Chandella art.

Before studying the art of the Chandellas, we must know the region over which the monuments were constructed during the period concerned. The frontiers of the Chandella kingdom varied from time to time but the area roughly corresponded to what is now known as Bundelkhand. At the zenith of Chandella power in the eleventh century, this region was bounded on all four sides by rivers—in the north by the Yamuna, in the south by the Narmada, in the east the Tamasa and in the west the Chambal.[46] The tract was known during sixth century B.C. as Chedi,[47] during Chandella times as Jejakabhukti,[48] and since the fourteenth century as Bundelkhand.[49] In ancient times, the region played a glorious role in the political and cultural history of India. According to local tradition, it contained the ashramas of famous rishis like Valmiki, Vedavayasa, Atri and Agastya.[50] The region is also famous for its numerous lakes, formed by erecting embankments across the streams. The province is rich in natural resources, and being traversed by many branches of the Vindhyas and still more numerous rivers and rivulets, it is remarkable for its natural beauty, which even attracted the notice of Rama.[51] Thus, geographical features influenced the physical and mental activities of the people of a concerned area. The mountains, rivers, fauna-flora, animals, reptiles and birds are reflected in the Chandella art and architecture. Similarly, the racial features of the people are also reflected in their sculptural art. The numerous art motifs and decorative patterns and designs are taken from the natural surroundings of the region. The rocks of the region provided artistes, the material for construction of temples, caves, tanks and sculptures. Similarly, the stone quarries of Panna provided sandstone for the the construction of temples and sculptures at Khajuraho. A panel kept in the Khajuraho museum depicts a large number of labourers carrying stones with the help of long wooden pole.[52] The diamond mines at Panna equally added to the rulers' richness to construct highprofile temples at Khajuraho and in other art centres. The geographical factor plays a very significant role in the study of art and architecture of any region. The same is the case with Chandella art.

Sculptural art and architecture received patronage from the rulers of the Chandella dynasty. Temples were built during rule of the Chandella dynasty, either by the rulers themselves or by their queens, chiefs, and Jain merchants. The Chandellas were originally inhabitants of Jejakabhukti.[53] They accepted the overlordship of the imperial Pratiharas of Kanauj. Gradually they became independent by the middle of the A.D. tenth century.[54]

Yasovarman (cA.D. 925–950), seventh in the line, really established the Chandellas as an independent power. The most important achievement of Yasovarman was the conquest of Kalanjara. A Khajuraho inscription states : 'He easily conquered the Kalanjara mountain, the dwelling-place of Siva, which is so high that it impedes the progress of the sun at mid-day.'[55] The question as to who Yasovarman conquered Kalanjara from is a controversial one.[56] Yasovarman acquired the prestigious and historic Varkuntha-Visnu image[57] from his Pritihara overlord Devapala, and declared his victory by building a magnificient temple, the first in the Nagara style at Khajuraho, decorating it profusely with sculptures.[58] This temple is known today as the Lakshmana temple. The ruler also installed a huge image of the Varaha incarnation of Vishnu in front of the temple. The Varaha, who in Hindu mythology rescued the Prithivi from primeval waters, had become a political metaphor in India from the A.D. fifth century, and symbolised the king saving the earth by destroying enemies. By installing the mighty Varaha at Khajuraho, Yasovarman asserted his own power.[59] He certainly seems to have created a lasting impression on the popular mind, poetically described by Chandella court poet Madhava in the following words: 'In the halls of princes, where sages dwell (and) and where good people meet, in the village, in the assemblages of lowly, among the rows of shops of merchants, (and) where street cross, where wanderers talk together on the road, (land) in the huts of the dwellers of the forest, every where, every body constantly from astonishment is loud only in praise of his excellencies.'[60] The inscription gives us a graphic picture of Chandella society and life of the different kinds of peoples. Similarly, Chandella sculptures depict every aspect of human life from birth to decay—every phase of our imagination, realistic or otherwise portrayed with great delicacy through the chisel of the artistes of Chandellas. Thus, art activities started in full form during his reign. An inscription also credits him with the excavation of a big tank, which may be identical with one of the tanks situated in and around the village of Khajuraho.[61] Yasovarman was one of the most remarkable rulers of his times who patronised art activities.

Dhanga Deva (cA.D. 950–999) was the son and successor of Yasovarman. He was the most remarkable ruler of Chandella dynasty. According to a Khajuraho inscription, he ruled over the earth, playfully acquired by the action of his long and strong arms, as far as Kalanjara and as far as Bhasvat, situated on the banks of Malava, from here also to the frontiers of the Chedi country and even as far as that mountain called Gopa.[62] This passage giving the precise limits of the dominion of the Chandella king is unique in the epigraphs. He was the first ruler who refused to accept the overlordship of the Pratiharas. He assumed the title of 'Sri Kalanjara-dhipathi.'[63] He was a worshipper of Siva and installed two *lingas*, one made of emerald and the other of stone, in the temple then called Marakatesvara, and now known as the Vishnatha temple.[64] The temple was consecrated in A.D. 999 after Dhanga's death. He lived for more than a century and thought it fit to end his life at the holy confluence of the Ganga and the Yamuna.[65] His reign was also remarkable for artistic activities.

Ganda Deva (cA.D. 999–1002) was the son and successor of Dhanga. He ruled for a few years according to the changed chronology of Chandella rulers on the basis of Kundeshwar copper plate inscription of Queen Satyabhama, the wife of King Vidyadhara.[66] We have not even a single inscription of the ruler so far, but his name and achievements figure in the records of his successors.[67] Due to his short rule, we have little information regarding art activities.

Vidyadhara (cA.D. 1003–1035), the son and successor of Ganda, was one of the most powerful Indian rulers of his time as described by the Ibn-ul-Athir.[68] He played an important role in mobilising the Indian princes against the raids of Mahmud of Ghazni.[69] Particularly memorable was the invasion of 1022, when Mahmud invested the fort of Kalanjara, 'which has no equal in the whole country of Hindustan for strength and impregnability.'[70] Under him the Chandella kingdom reached the zenith of its prosperity. Vidyadhara won victories over the Kalachuris and the Parmaras, the two contemporary rivals in Central India.[71] To celebrate his victory he built the grandest temple at Khajuraho, the Kandariya Mahadeva.[72] Thus he continued the temple building traditions of his predecessors. The Kandariya-Mahadeva temple is the largest and grandest temple of Khajuraho. Vidyadhara was not only a powerful ruler but also a great patron of art and architecture.

Vidyadhara's successors **Vijaypala** (cA.D. 1035–1050) and **Devavarman** (cA.D. 1050–1060) lost part of their territory to their powerful neighbours, the Kalachuris.[73]

It was **Kirtivarman** (cA.D. 1060–1100) who reestablished Chandella power after defeating the Kalachuris of Tripuri.[74] He celebrated his victory by staging an allegorical play *Prabodhchandrodaya* written by his court poet Krishna Mishra.[75] Significantly, the play ridicules extreme trantric sects such as the Kapalikas. The king built temples at Mahoba, Kalanjara and Ajaigarh.[76] He was the first ruler who issued coins.[77]

The next ruler, **Jayavarman** (cA.D. 1110–1120) carried out some renovation works at Khajuraho and possibly built the Chaturbhuja temple, with its exquisite Vishnu image.[78]

Madanavarman (cA.D. 1128–1165) was also an important and powerful ruler of the Chandella dynasty. He was associated with the construction of the Duladeo temple at Khajuraho and other similar architectural activities at Ajaigarh and Kalanjara.[79] A number of towns and tanks in different parts of Bundelkhand perpetuate Madanavarman's memory to the present day.[80] An inscription from Kalanjara refers to chief dancer Padmavati during his reign at Kalanjara.[81] Madanavarman was great patron of art and culture.

Parmardideva (cA.D. 1165–1203), the grandson of Madanavarman, was a patron of artists, poets and scholars.[82] His rivalary with King Prithiviraja Chahamana has been recorded in the *Prithiviraja Raso* and the '*Paramal Raso*'.[83] He himself composed an inscription in praise of Siva at Kalanjara.[84] He was defeated by Qutubuddin Aibak in 1202, following which the power of the Chandellas began declining. Paramardideva is known for the patronage of art and promotion of learning.[85] A number of monuments in different parts of Bundelkhand are associated with him, particularly at Kalanjara and Ajaigarh.[86]

Trailokyavarman (cA.D. 1203–1245), was the next powerful ruler. The Ajaigarh rock inscription of Kalyadevi states that 'Trailokyavarman ruled the kingdom after Paramardideva'.[87] The most important achievement of Trailokyavarman was the reconquest of Kalanjara, which had been captured by Qutubuddin Aibak.[88] Trailokyavarman had a fairly long reign and during his time he also patronised artistic activities, particularly at Kalanjara and Ajaigarh.[89] Trailokyavarman had given a land grant to one Rauta whose father was killed in the battle-field without any condition by way of maintenance for death (*mrityukavritti*).[90] This indicates that the sacrifice of life was honoured by the Chandella kings.

Viravarman (cA.D. 1250–1286) was the successor of Trailokyavarman. The Ajaigarh stone inscription of Ganapati states that he had installed the image of Dani Vinayaka at Ajaigarh fort.[91] Another inscription from the same place records the construction of a *nirjara-kupa* at Ajaigarh and of tank and hall at Nandipura by Viravarman's queen Kalyanadevi.[92] The Kalanjara inscription refers to Viravarman's work of public utility. He is credited with the construction of various temples, gardens, ponds and tanks, and with installation of the images of Siva, Kamla and Kali.[93] Similarly, an Ajaigarh inscription refers to the installation of a Jaina image during his reign.[94]

Bhojavarman (cA.D. 1285–1288) was the last important ruler of the Chandella dynasty. An Ajaigarh rock inscription refers to the construction of a temple by Subhata at that place. The temple must have been dedicated to Siva.[95]

The Chandella kings not only constructed temples and tanks, they also encouraged literature, dance and music and other fine arts. The refined culture of Chandella period is reflected in the visual arts of the Chandellas. Thus, the political condition of the Chandella period had a significant role in the study of Chandella monuments and their chronology.

The rule of the Chandellas was a significant factor for the development of art traditions in the region concerned. Art activities started in this area as early as the pre-historic period. Many pre-historic rock painting sites have been discovered in the Jejakabhukti region.[96] In art activities this region played an important role from cB.C. 200 onwards and witnessed a remarkable efflorescence of sculptural and architectural activities during the Sunga period, with Bharhut as a centre.[97] Jataka stories for the first time emerged in the carvings of Bharhut.[98] Again, during the Gupta times, main centres evolved at Bhumara, Khoh, Nachna, Eran, Vidisa and Deogarh. The Paravati temple at Nachna,[99] the Siva temple at Bhumara, Visnu temple at Eran, rock-cut caves at Udaigiri (Vidisha) and the Dasavatara temple at Deogarh form a significant stage in the development of Gupta temple architecture. Depiction of scenes from the *Ramayana* started in Indian art from Nachna.[100] In the seventh century A.D. Chaturmukha Mahadeo temple at Nachna, one of the earliest typical Sikhara temples of north India,[101] is even more important and constitutes a significant phase in architecture, marking the termination between the Gupta and medieval temple styles.[102] The building tradition was continued by the Pratiharas who left in the region two of their finest temples, one at Barwasagar—the Jarai-Matha—and the other, the Sun temple at Mankhara (Tikamgarh) assignable to Circa ninth century A.D.[103] This was the art and architectural background of the Chandellas. It gives us an idea of the origin and development of art traditions in the region prior to the Chandellas.

Most of the art-historians have assigned the period of Chandella art from cA.D. 950–1050 on the basis of Khajuraho temples.[104] S.K. Saraswati[105] who studied the chronology of temples assigned the same period for Chandella art. Krishna Deva[106] refuted this theory and assigned the period of Chandella art from cA.D. 950 to 1100. R.N. Mishra[107] assigned the period from the ninth century A.D. to the 13th century A.D. Devangana Desai[108] attempted to fix the chronology of Khajuraho temples on the basis of the sculptural pattern. We have to study Chandella art not only on the basis of Khajuraho, but also on the basis of all the centres taken into consideration. The chronology of the monuments is to be fixed on the basis of architectural characteristics, style of sculptures, decorative patterns and inscriptional evidences.

It is also important that the monuments of the Chandellas were religious structures—temples built by their patrons for worship and for acquiring merit and fame. Temples were the centres of both religions and artistic expression in medieval India.[109] It is also significant that most of the Chandella temples and sculptures are connected with one or the other religious sects. The inspiration for creation is closely associated with the feeling that all worldly things are not permanent, they will be destroyed sooner or later. This philosophical thought narrated in many Chandella inscriptions[110] and also in inscriptions[111] of other dynasties, reflects that life is short and one should do something related to religion for the welfare of others. They inform of construction of temples, tanks and other pious works related to the general public for immortality in this world.[112]

The Chandellas were devout worshippers of Siva. Saivism was a popular religion in the Bundelkhand region long before the advent of the Chandellas.[113] Kalanjara, which was the famous stronghold of the Chandellas, was widely known from several centuries as an abode of Siva Nilakantha.[114] The name Kalanjara is said to have been derived from Siva himself, who as *Kala* causes all things responsible for decay (*Jar*) and is therefore, the destroyer of all things. He is the god of death. The ascetics of Kalanjara have been devoted to the worship of Siva.[115] Kalanjara has been a centre of Saivism from the earliest times. Another fort of the Chandellas, Ajaigarh, was also connected with the worship of Siva. This fort is mentioned as Nandipura[116] in an inscription, indicating its association with Saivism. The Chandella inscriptions named Siva as Nilakantha,[117] Mahadeva,[118] Visvanatha,[119] Mahesvara,[120] Rudra,[121] Digambara,[122] Suladhara,[123] Pasupati,[124] Vaidyanatha,[125] Kandarpi,[126] Kedara,[127] etc. The inscriptions of the later Chandella rulers begin with the invocation of Siva.[128] The temples of the Chandellas also reflect the importance of Saivism during their reign. The largest and the best of the Chandella temples, viz., the Kandariya Mahadeva, is dedicated to Siva. Matangesvara, the holy temple of Khajuraho, which is still under worship belongs to Siva. References to Saiva sects and Saiva Gurus are also found in the Chandella inscriptions. A Kalanjara inscription refers to Pasupata and Saiva sects of Saivism.[129]

Vaisnavism was also popular during the times of the Chandellas. Visnu is often mentioned in the inscriptions and many images have been found in the Chandella dominion. The Narasimha, Varaha, and Vamana were the most popular forms in which Visnu was worshipped during the Chandella regime.[130] Many images depicting Krishnalila[131] were found in Chandella art which shows the popularity of Krishna as an incarnation of Visnu. The depiction of Rama and Sita in a Jaina temple at Khajuraho shows religious tolerance and mutual understanding between the different religious sects.[132]

Other gods and goddesses frequently referred to in the Chandella inscription or in whose names temples have been dedicated, or whose images have been found are Parvati, Laxmi, Saraswati, Matrikas, Surya, Brahma and Hanumana.[133]

Devangana Desai[134] recently referred to the prevalence of Tantric-Pauranic religion during the times of the Chandellas. It was a composite and mixed religion with both Tantric and Pauranic elements.[135] In the tenth century A.D., the Puranas which were earlier against the Tantras, now adopted several Tantric elements such as mantras, yantras and mandalas.[136] The composite religious practices at Khajuraho are exemplified in the Lakshmana, one of the largest Visnu temples that enshrine the esoteric icon of the Vaikuntha. Built in A.D. 954, it was associated with Tantric Vaisnavism of the Kashmir school (Puncharatra).[137] The Kandariya Mahadeo, one of the magnificient Khajuraho temples, built in about A.D. 1030, was affilitated to the moderate Tantric Saivite order called Siddhanta.[138] Both these Tantra-based Vaisnava and Saivite religions existed side by side and functioned within the Brahmanical fold. Unlike the Kapalika sect, they were not extreme Tantrics, but were influenced by the Vedic revival and incorporated Puranic elements. Both systems believed in the role of Sakti in the creation and dissolution of universe. The Supreme Being is both transcendent and unmanifest and also imminent and manifest in graded powers and elements.[139] This development led to a hierarchical order in images, the principal divinity and its emanation and sub-emanations. The iconic scheme of the temples indicates gradation of images in relation to the centre of the sanctums. In short, the architects have presented the temple as cosmos.[140] The Chandella temples were active religious and cultural centres in the medieval period,[141] without studying them one cannot justify and understand the Chandella art.

The construction of temples is generally based on the wishes of royality and the local needs of the people. But we cannot assign the construction of temples and other monuments to only one class of people. Krishna Deva[142] assigned the temple construction at Khajuraho from Yasovarman to Vidyadhara. From inscriptional sources we know that queens, high officials, rich traders, religious teachers and common men also played an important role in construction of temples and monuments.[143] The artisans also made an important contribution in the artistic activities during the Chandella period. The Chandella copper plates give us very valuable information regarding the craftsmen. The title *Silpin* was not applied to a craftsman until he became an expert in his craft. The title *Vijnanin* was certainly superior to the title *Silpin*. It was applied only to those senior *silpins* who attained further skill and efficiency in their respective crafts. Palhana, the engraver of Simra plates,[144] is described as merely a metal carver, *pitalkara*. But the Icchawar plates[145] issued five years later, mention him as *Silpin*, and further experience for about two more years made him a *Vijananin*, as claimed in the Mahoba plates.[146] In the Pachar plates[147] and Charkhari plates,[148] the same craftsman has been mentioned as *Vaidagdhi Visvakarman*, master of the art and craft. By this time he had reached a stage in his craft career when his knowledge was not confined to the bare technicalities of craft, but embraced a wider field including the aesthetic aspects of craft, which was recognised by the aristocratic patrons of art and culture.[149]

Thus, we may conclude that in art activities, all sections of society made their contributions according to their positions. To some up we may say that Chandella art is a composite effort of all the sections. The rulers patronised only the architectural activities of temple construction.

Chandella sculptures may firstly be divided in two sections, viz.,:

1. Stone sculptures
2. Rock-cut sculptures

The stone sculptures were carved by sculptors on the stone slabs brought by the labourers from nearby stone quarries. We find a beautiful illustration on one panel sculpture at Khajuraho, where a stone slab is depicted as being brought by the labourers and the sculptor is shown sitting and carving the sculptures.[150] This panel indicates the sculpture making process at Khajuraho. The stone sculptures were mostly the component of temple architecture in Chandella art. Sculptures of this type are classified by Krishnadeva[151] into five categories. Desai[152] classified them into eight categories. Generally, art historians accept the classification of Krishna Deva.

The first category comprises formal cult-images executed almost completely in the round, in strict conformity with textual formulae and prescriptions.[153] These sculptures were installed in a sanctum or in some particular place. These images lack aesthetic expressions, and they are generally carved in the standing posture.

The second category comprises *parivara, parsva* and *avarana-devatas* (family, attendant and enclosing divinities). These sculptures are carved in the niches or are figured against the walls of temples and are executed either in round or in high or medium relief. Sculptures occurring in the niches are more formal and partake of the iconographic qualities of the cult image of the first category. The remaining figures of gods and goddess which include those of *Dik-palas*, are less formal and more free. These usually stand in attractive *tribhanga* and are distinguishable from humans only by their particular head dress or mounts or special attributes, held usually in more than two hands.[154]

The third category of the sculptures consists of the *apsaras* or *Sura sundaris*, who account for the finest and most numerous sculptures in Chandella art, executed either in round or in high or medium relief on the outer or inner walls, pillars and ceilings. The *apsaras* are invariably represented as handsome and youthful nymphs, attired in choicest gems and dresses and full of winsome grace and charm. As heavenly dancers, they are shown dancing in various postures. As attendants of higher divinities, they are represented with folded hands or as carrying the lotus-flower, mirror, water jar, raiments, ornaments, etc., as offerings for the deities.[155] But more frequently, the *Sura-sundaris* are portrayed to express common human moods, emotions and activities and are often difficult to distinguish from conventional *nayikas*.[156] Such *apsaras* are shown as disrobing, yawning, scratching the back, touching the breasts,* rinsing water from the wet plaits of hair, removing thorns, fondling a baby, playing with pets like parrots and monkeys, writing a letter, playing on a flute or vina, painting designs on the wall or bedecking themselves in various ways by painting the feet, applying collyrium, etc.[157] The *apsaras* are also found at Kalanjara, Ajaigarh and some other sites of Chandella art. The *apsaras* of Khajuraho are the best creation of Chandella art. The medieval Vastu texts specifically ordain the carving of female figures on temple walls. Orissan text Shilpa Prakash states, 'As a house without a wife, as frolic without wife, so without figure of a woman the monuments will be of inferior and bear no fruit.'[158] This text describes sixteen types of female figures in various activities.[159] The *apsaras* of Khajuraho and other Chandella art centres are auspicious motifs whose origin can be traced to *yakshis* and fortility figures of early Indian art at Sanchi, Bharhut and *Mathura*.[160] The *apsaras* of the Khajuraho are the best creation of the Chandella artiste.

The fourth category consists of secular sculptures which comprise various themes including domestic life scenes, teachers and disciples, dancers and musicians, and erotic couples or groups. The last include some of the finest sculptural compositions of Chandella art, vibrating with rare sensitiveness and warmth of human emotion.[161]

The fifth or the last category is of sculptures of animals including the *vayal* or *sardula*, which is heraldic and a fabulous animal, primarily represented as a rampant horned lion with an armed human rider on the back and a warrior counter-player attacking it from behind. Different varieties of this basic

* see, plate 1.

type are known with heads of elephants, men, parrot, boar, etc. Like the *apsaras*, this most typical and popular sculptural theme of Chandella art is similarly related with deep symbolism.[162] The Chandella artist has also depicted the royal hunt, different types of animals, birds, reptiles and others for decorative purpose. We find a beautiful ornamental decoration of snakes at the Ajaigarh fort temple.[163] A very rich fauna and flora finds its place in Chandella art.

The second section of Chandella sculptural art consists of rock-cut sculptures which are less studied by art-historians. They are overshadowed by the charm of the magnificient temple sculptures of Khajuraho. The rock-cut sculptures were carved at Ajaigarh, Kalanjara, Deogarh and Gwalior. In these sculptures we find the development of rock-cut art tradition of Udaigiri (Vidisa). The Chandella artist utilised the rocks for construction of caves, tanks, ponds and various types of sculptures were carved related to different religions prevalent during the Chandella period. We find the cult imge of Siva, Visnu, Sakti and Jaina *tirthankaras* carved in rocks at various places.[164] At Kalanjara fort there were many small and bigger *Mukha linga* images carved out in rock near the Nilakantha temple. A unique large Mahabhairva or Kala-Bhairva iamge was carved by the Chandella artist during the time of Paramardideva. It is even mentioned in the Ain-i-Akbari.[165] The portrait type rock-cut images of Mirki-Bhairva and Bhairvi are the unique rock-cut sculptures found at Kalanjara.[166] The unique nine headed Mahasadasiva image near Nilakantha temple is also a rare creation of the Chandella artiste at Kalanjara. Some *patta* sculptures are also carved at Kalanjara which are very significant for the study of composite form of worship[167]. The characteristic feature of these is that they are independent and not the part of any temple architecture.

The sculptural art of the Chandellas surpassed the contemporary art in revealing the sensuous and many-sided charm of the human body. Inspired by an artistic joy of living and consuming passion for physical beauty, the Chandella artist revealed in admiring the human body from the most fascinating angle which gives us fine profiles and unusual three quarter profile of back views. The Chandella art represents female types of ravishing beauty, vaunting their voluptuous charms in an infinite variety of lovely attitude and postures*.[168] In fact, this art excels all other contemporary schools in vivid portrayal of human moods and fancies which are often expressed through the medium of gestures and flexioun with subtle but purposive sensuous provocation**.[169] The classical flavour persists in Chandella sculptures, combining the subtlety of modelling with amplitude of volume serene expression.

The Chandella art is very significant for the study of iconography. The Chandella temples were dedicated to Visnu, Siva, Surya, Sakti and the *Tirthankaras*. The Chandella artists have carved some rare images of these divinities which express deep philosophical concepts. The Chandella rulers were worshippers of Vishnu. Vishnu is associated with royalty and regal power. All his ten incarnations are represented in Chandella art. The Varaha, Vamana and Narasimha incarnations of Vishnu were popular in the Chandella region. Their temples and images are found at many places of Bundelkhand. Vaikuntha, a composite form, with faces of Varaha and a lion along with a human face, was installed in a temple at Khajuraho by the Chandella Yasovarman.[170] There is also a four-faced Vaikuntha, with an additional face of horse, now in Khajuraho Museum.[171] The other incarnations represented in Chandella art are Matsya, Kurma, Narasimha, Parasurama, Rama, Balarama, Krishna, Buddha and Kalki. Among the rare images at Khajuraho are those of Visnu as Yogesvara, seated in the *padmasana*, giving discourse to sages, placed in the upper cardinal niche of the Lakshman temple. Visnu making a gesture of silence with his forefinger near his lips is one unique sculpture not found anywhere else in Indian art.[172] The scenes of *Krishnalila* in different forms are also depicted in Chandella art.[173] The exchange of babies' scene is rare in Chandella art, depicted in a pillar at Kalanjara.[174]

Both the placid and terrific manifestations of Siva are represented in Chandella art. These are Natesh, Kalayan Sundara, Ardhanarisvara, Uma-Maheshvara, Andhakasuravadha, Tripurantaka, Bhairava and others.

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* see plates 2 and 3.

** see plate 4.

The most important is the Sadasiva image of Siva from Khajuraho, depicting him with four feet. This four-footed image of Sadasiva metaphorically suggests the four parts of the text of the Saiva Siddhanta sect, associated with the Chandellas.[175]

Various forms of *linga* images of Siva are also depicted and installed in the Siva temples. At Kalanjara we find unique *linga* images of a seated *nandi* bearing a Siva *linga* or *pancha lingas**.[176]

There is a fairly good number of images of divine couples like Indra and Sachi, Kama and Rati, Ganesha and Vighneswari, Kuber and Ridhi, Uma-Mahesvara, Brahma-Saraswati, Laxmi-Narayana, Balarama-Ravati, Rama-Sita, Agni-Swaha.[177] These divine couple images are also in bigger number and we do not find such a depiction elsewhere in Indian art.

The Jaina and Buddhist images which were carved by the Chandella artists are also unique in form, expressions and composition. The cult images carved by the Chandella artist were based on the textual details as referred to in the works of Vastusastra. Still, some sculptures are unique for the study of iconography.**

The study of Chandella art will be incomplete without a reference to the erotic sculptures. A word is necessary on the significance of the erotic sculptures of Chandella art, which by their vividness and character cannot fail to attract the visitor. But erotic sculpture is not the only attraction of Chandella art. One must keep in mind that erotic figures do not even account for one-tenth of the Chandella sculptures, most of which represent divinities, celestial females and mythic animals. Moreover, erotic figures are depicted on most temples of India built between A.D. 900 to A.D. 1300, and are represented according to the sculptural scheme of the region in which they are situated.[178] At Khajuraho, erotic images are placed on the main wall portion of the temples and, therefore, are large, about a metre in height and graceful, thus drawing

* see plate 5.

** see plate 6.

immediate attention to themselves. In the temples of western and southern India they are located in smaller rows of the plinth, below eye level or on balcony panels, hence they do not attract the notice of visitors, as do the bigger figures on the temple walls of Khajuraho.[179]

The tradition of depicting erotic figures was not introduced by the Chandella artist. It was a part of a larger tradition prevalent at an all-India level.[180] The configuration of various factors which leads to erotic depiction in Indian art form the first century B.C. to A.D thirteenth century has been well discussed by Devangana Desai.[181]

There are several hypotheses that attempt to explain the sensual figures in religious art. The reason that erotic figures represent Kama, the third *purusharthas*, or that they are intended to test the spiritual strength of the yogis, or for sex-knowledge, does not stand in the face of the variety and kinds of figures displayed in the temples.

Erotic sculptures occur in the art of all the three religious sects—Brahmanical, Buddhist and Jaina—and arise out a common substratum of magico-religious beliefs and practices associated with fertility cults. According to Devangana Desai,[182] the rites of 'fertility' involved actual sexual practice or its symbolic representation. The word 'fertility' is employed here not to indicate only its primary purpose of procreation but also its wider connotations, the aversion of evil, death and misfortune, and the promotion of life, happiness, prosperity and auspiciousness.[183]

The *shilpa shastras* and other authoritative texts on temple architecture have recognised both the auspicious and protective aspects of erotic sculptures. The *Brihat Samhita* clearly ordains that *mithunas* should decorate the temple door, along with creepers, *ganas* and other auspicious and luck-bring motifs. Erotic motifs were considered an *alankara*, protective and auspicious in function.[184]

Due to changing socio-religious conditions and the increasing influence of tantric practices, the fertility aspects of erotic sculpture changed. During the period between A.D. 600 and A.D. 900, coital couples were depicted in temple art, but this theme was not too frequent. From A.D. 900 onwards, the ruling dynasties of the medieval period competed with one another in displaying their wealth and power by constructing bigger and more lavishly decorated temples. It was at this period that the depiction of erotic figures increased in art. Many temples in India built between A.D. 900 and A.D. 1300 openly display erotic themes.[185] Khajuraho is also one such site of Chandella art.

People generally interpret the Chandella erotic sculptures as depicting the art of love making as described in the *Kamasutra* of Vatsayayana. Although the *Kamasutra* and other texts of love were studied by the cultural elite of India, the portrayal of erotic figures on temples does not seem to have originated a secular interest in sex manuals. Erotic sculptures on the temples of Khajuraho, and other sites belonged to a different tradition, where both religious and wordly interests could merge. Chandella sculptures were not mainly created to illustrate the different postures described in texts about sex. The themes depicted in the temples could not, by any stretch of imagination, be for sex education. It could be possible that the artists, like their counterparts the literary writers and poets, displayed their knowledge of the *Kamasutra* or similar texts. It is interesting to note that the temple sculptors have depicted couples performing oral sex, a posture that is condemned in the *Kamasutra*.[186] Just like the Sanskrit poets of the period, the sculptors have also made fun of ascetics of rival sects by depicting them in the condemnatory posture.[187]

The theory that the Khajuraho temples belonged to apparently hedonistic religious sects like the Kapalikas, who expressed their philosophy through erotic art, is also not acceptable.[188] There is no evidence to support the association of the Kalalikas with temple management. The sculptures do represent scenes which show ascetics and royal personages participating in orgies. These scenes may indicate a possible situation known or imagined by the artist, but temple builders were not likely to display themselves in lurid sexual practices. It is possible, therefore, that royal and ascetic sculptures are deliberately used to mock certain debased practices of extreme Tantric sects. This attitude is reflected in the Sanskrit literature of the period as well.[189]

Erotic sculptures first appear in Chandella art at Khajuraho in A.D. 950, on its earliest built Lakshman temple, dedicated to Visnu-Vaikuntha. By this period, architects were quite familiar with the use of erotic motifs in temple art as an auspicious ornament, protective in function. At Khajuraho, the architects assigned erotic motifs to the following places: the door-jamb of sanctum, the human places row of the plinth, the row of the platform along with royal past times, battle scenes, and dancers, the recesses of the *Jangha*, and niches of superstructures. Couples are also placed round the images of Matrikas in the two Siva temples—the Visvanatha and the Kandariya Mahadeva—which is a practice followed in the temples of Gujarat and Rajasthan[190] also. The Mothers were said to be appeased by the performance of the procreative act, or its substitution. The depiction of erotic figure is a substitute for the actual act.[191] What, however, draws the attention of keen observer in Chandella art is not the variety of erotic subjects centring around ascetics and aristocrats and their bold display, but also their particular placement in the sculptural scheme of the temples. The architect has placed erotic sculptures on the wall portion between the two balconies in three major temples. The wall portion is actually the architectural juncture of the big hall and the sanctum. According to Devangana Desai, here the architect has employed puns and intentional language called *Sandhya bhasha*. This is a code language used by esoteric religious practitioners and Tantrik texts conceal their doctrines from outsiders. This enigmatic language employs erotic terminology to convey non-communicable experiences, which cannot be expressed in ordinary language. For example, when one reads: 'A washer woman clings to the yogi on his neck', it is found to be erotic if taken literally. But in the code language of the Tantras, it means that the washer women, i.e., Kundalini energy has ascended to the *chakra* (subtle centre) of the neck. Similarly, figures on temple walls could be metaphoric and might conceal a deeper symbolism.[192]

There are two notable head-down postures on the juncture walls of the two Siva temples at Khajuraho. Their composition is remarkable, similar to the *Kamakala yantra* of the architectural text *Shilp Prakasha*. This text states that such a *yantra* is to be placed in temples for magico-propitiatory purposes. It would defend the temple against calamities and evil spirits. But the lines of the *yantra* have to be hidden from the gaze of non-initiated persons by covering them with erotic figures, which in turn would 'delight' lay persons.[193]

Thus, the erotic figures of Chandella art have multiple functions such as they are magico-defensive and auspicious motifs, as elsewhere in Indian art. They 'delight' common visitors. They possibly conceal a *yantra* beneath the head-down posture image on the juncture of the two Siva temples and they seem to embody some yogic-philosophic meaning or concept through *Sandhya bhasha* in the juncture wall panel of the three major temples of Khajuraho. In terms of Yoga, they could symbolically represent the process of the unification of the two breaths, *prana* and *apana*, inhalation and exhalation, the combining of two polar opposites, which leads to the non-conditioned timeless state of non-duality.[194]

Whatever be the interpretation of these erotic scenes, there is certainly nothing coarse about them. These representations have given us some of the sensitiveness and warmth of emotion and are remarkable for their sculptural beauty. As temples were dedicated to the search of the supreme, these artistic creations and exuberant manifestations of the creative urge should have sprung from deep-rooted tradition with a possible religious sanction. The depiction of erotic sculpture is thus related to traditions, religious practices and having sanction from state and society equally, otherwise such erotic depiction may not be allowed in temples. In this period, depiction of erotic sculptures was not considered unethical or obscene, that is why it finds a unique place in Chandella art.

The integrated study of Chandella art reveals that it has made a unique contribution in medieval Indian art and befittingly the Khajuraho temples have been considered and recognised as a world heritage site by the UNESCO since 1986. The Chandella forts and other sites are worth studying from the point of view of art development and their contribution is equally significant.

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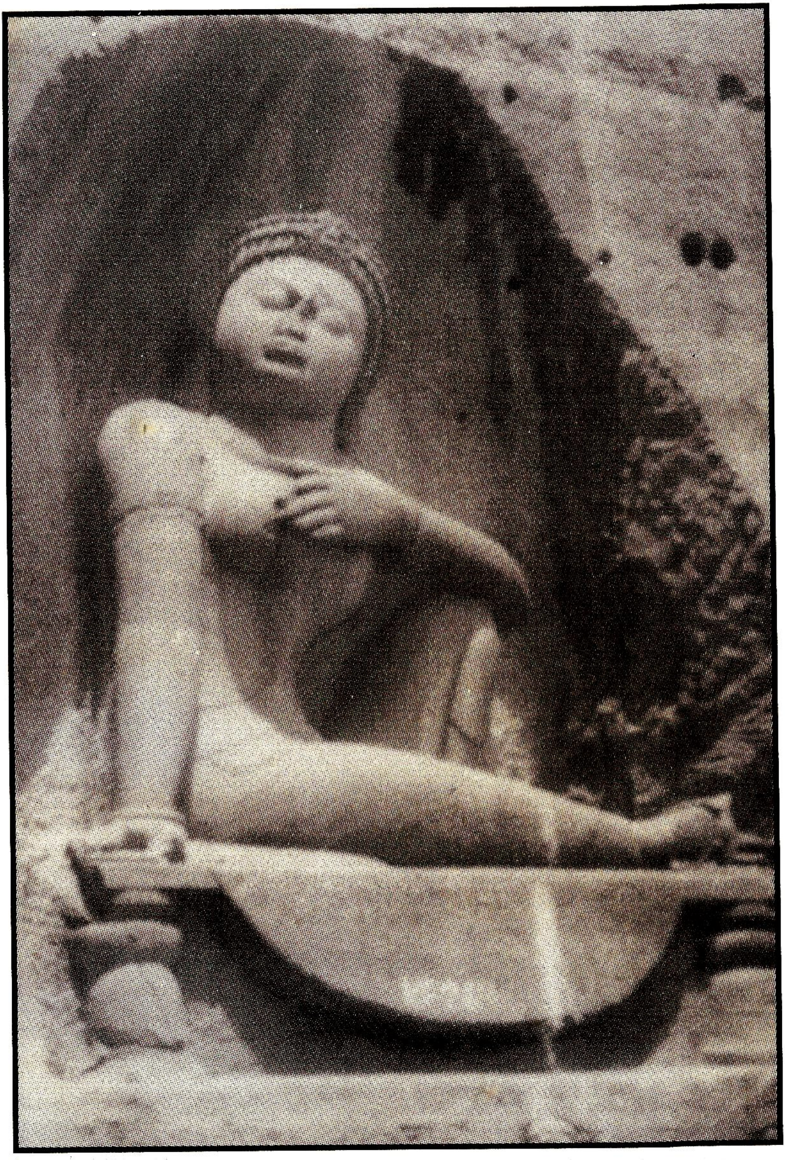

PLATE 1 : Bhairavi from Kalanjara.

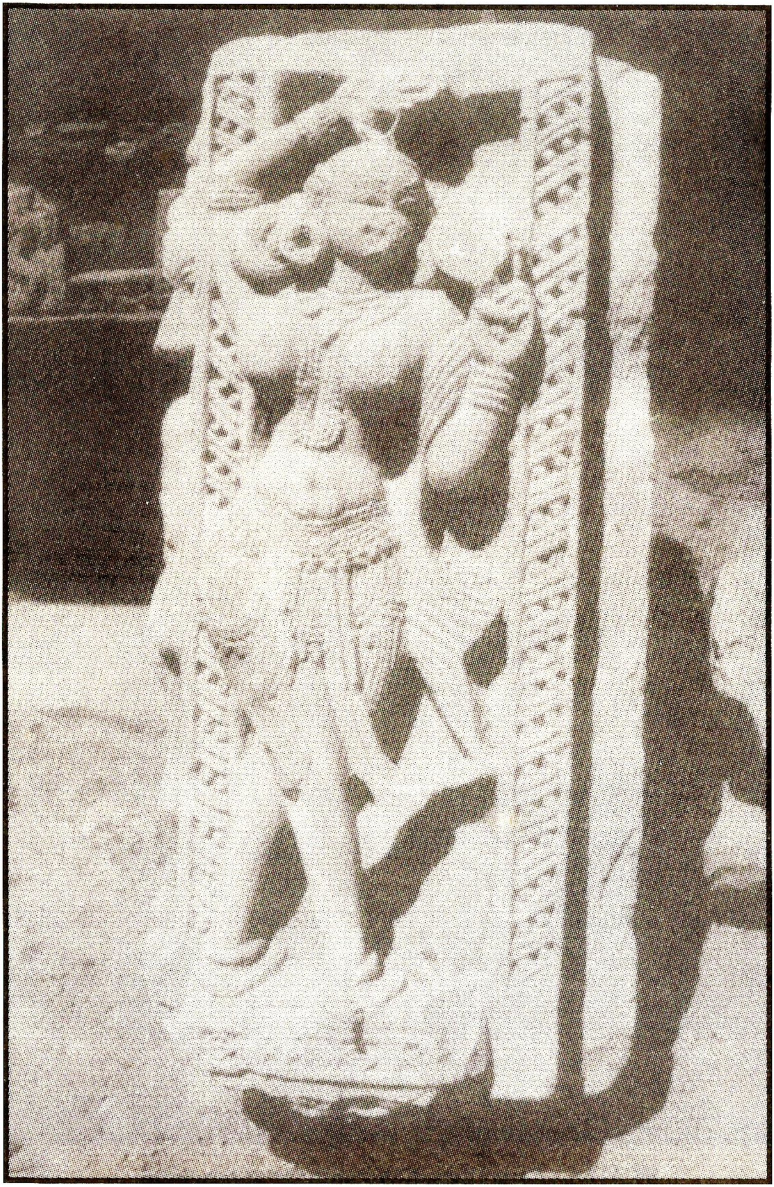

PLATE 2 : Apsara from Kalanjara (*Darpana*).

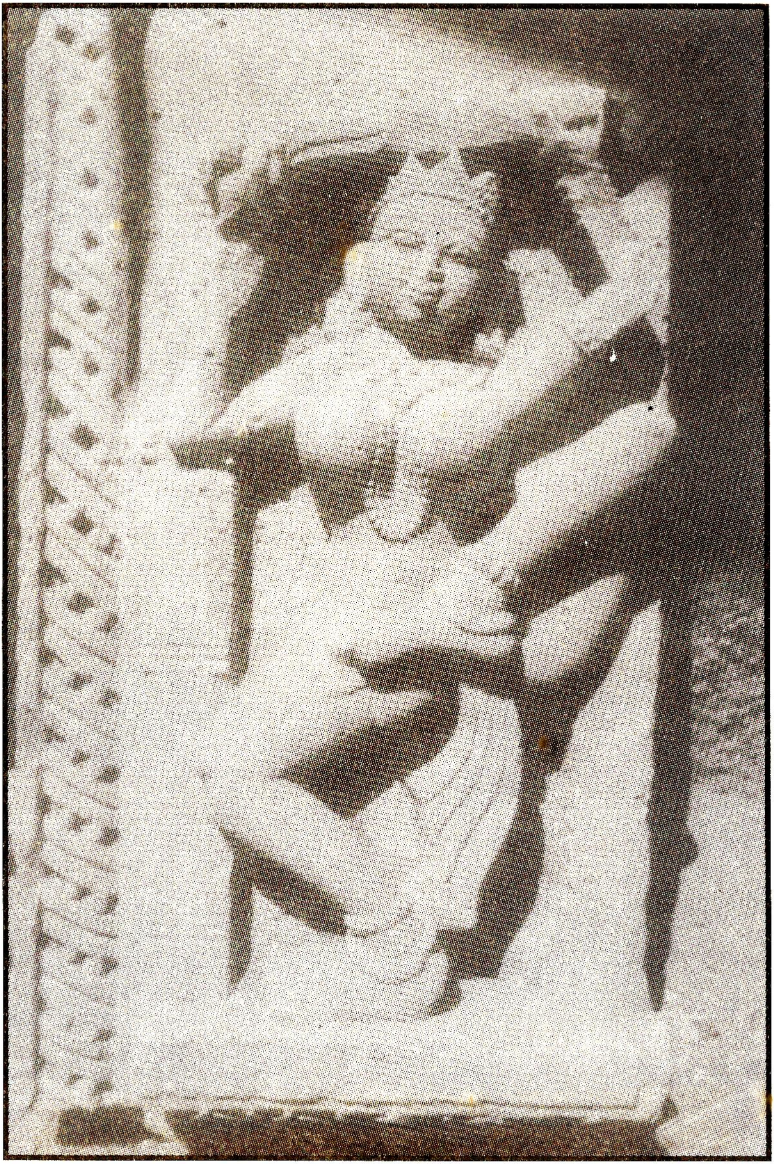

PLATE 3 : Dancer from Kanlanjara.

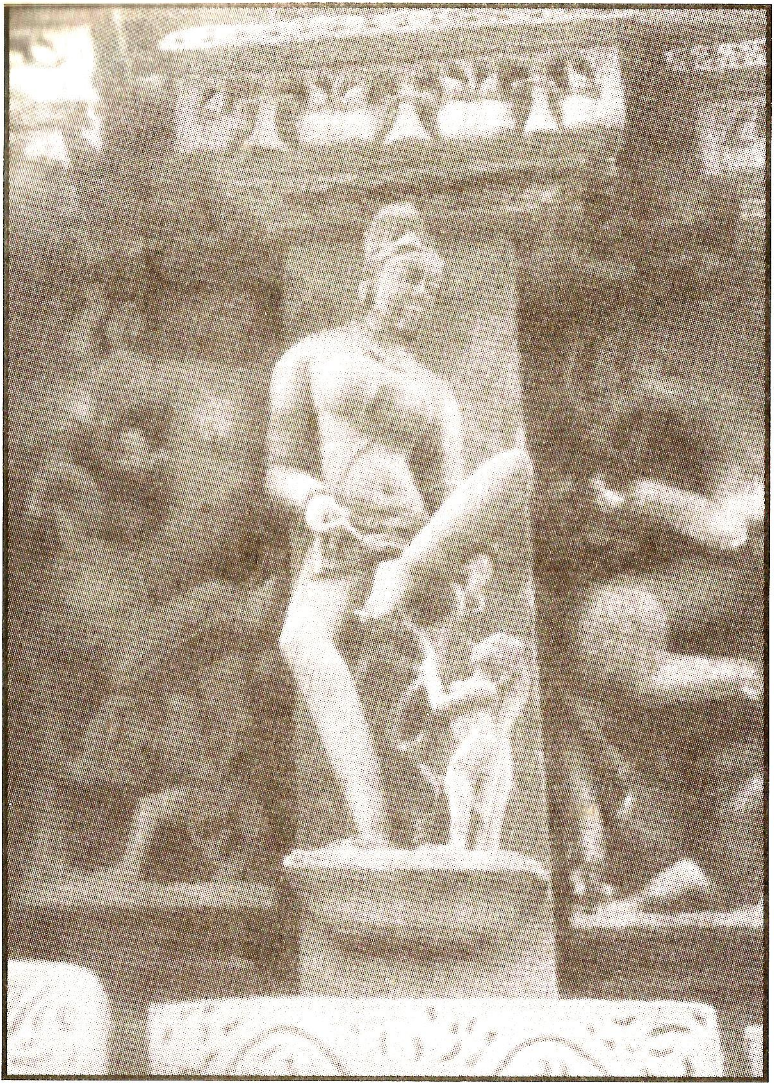

PLATE 4 : Apsara from Khajuraho (*Nupur Bandhika*).

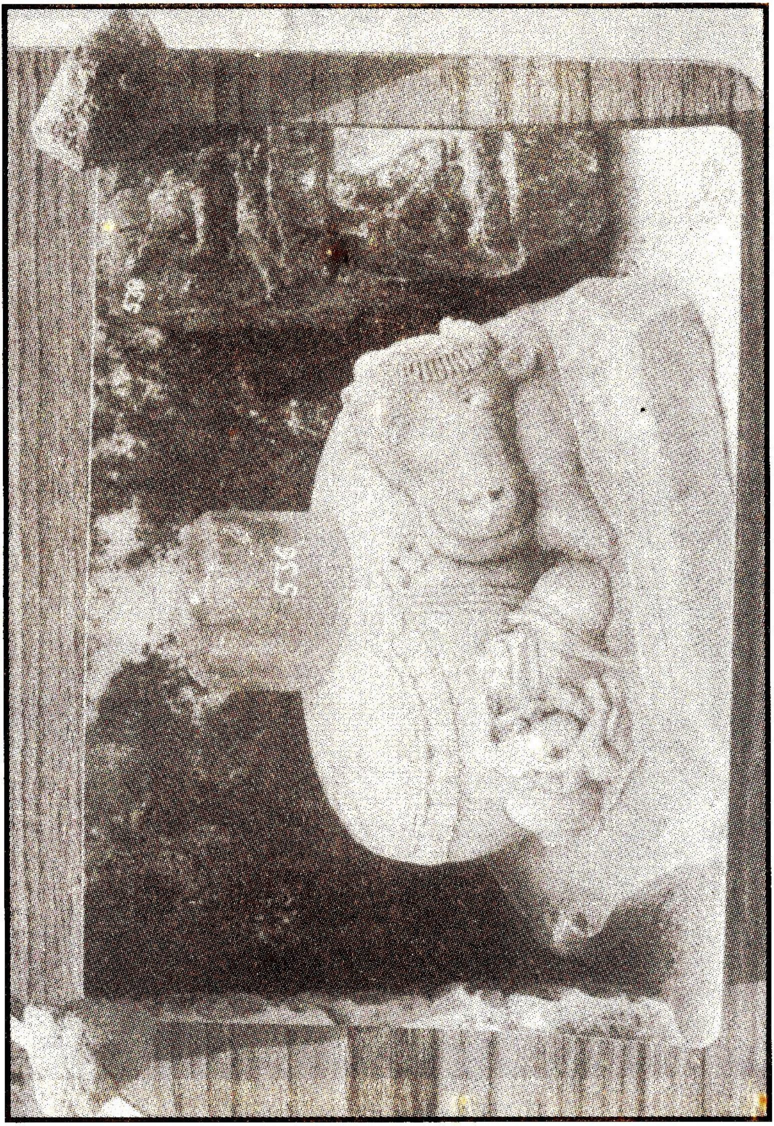

PLATE 5 : Nandi bearing a Shiv linga on his back (Kalanjara).

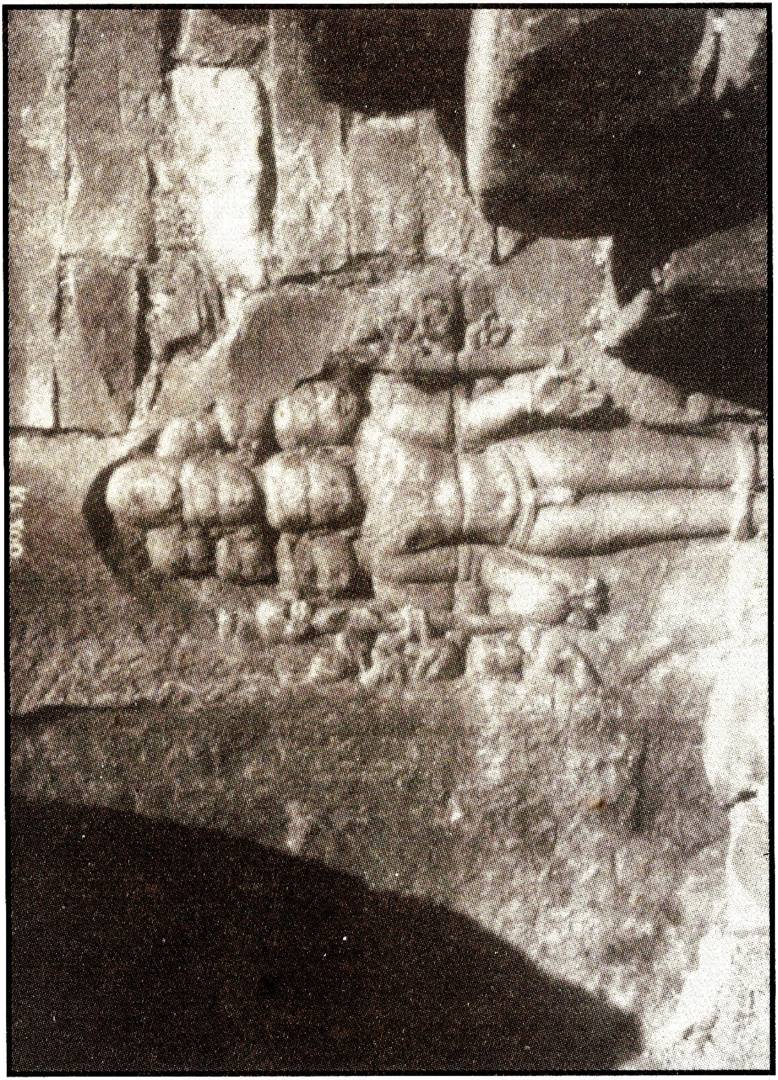

PLATE 6 : Mahasadashiv from Kalanjara.